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Human resources development

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The General Assembly, in its resolution 56/189, recognized the importance of developing human resources as a means, inter alia, of promoting economic growth and eradicating poverty as well as of participating more effectively in the world economic system and benefiting from globalization. The present report responds to the mandate contained in that resolution. It builds on the broader view of human resources development that emerged over recent years and focuses on the issues addressed in the resolution. It highlights human resources as a means of promoting economic growth and eradicating poverty and focuses on the role of information and communication technologies in promoting human resources development. It further addresses the need for adequate resources and financing to increase investment in human resources development.

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** The submission of the present report was delayed owing to the need for extensive consultations with various offices of the United Nations to reflect the latest developments in the work of the United Nations on human resources development.

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I. Introduction

1. Human resources development is central to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, targets and commitments contained in the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits and the Millennium Declaration, particularly those relating to poverty eradication and sustainable development. Five of the eight goals contained in the Millennium Declaration are directly related to health and education — the key components of human resources development.

2. The importance of human resources development for achieving the internationally agreed development goals has been repeatedly recognized at the intergovernmental level. The General Assembly, in paragraph 2 of its resolution 56/189 of 21 December 2001, recognized the importance of developing human resources as a means, inter alia, of promoting economic growth and eradicating poverty as well as of participating more effectively in the world economic system and benefiting from globalization. The Economic and Social Council, in its ministerial declaration of 2002, also stated that human resources development is a fundamental aspect of poverty eradication and vital to the process of sustainable development, contributing to sustained economic growth, social development and environmental protection.[1]

3. Human resources development and specific aspects related to health and education have remained at the forefront of the international agenda. The General Assembly special sessions on HIV/AIDS and on children provided guidance and commitments on health and education. The Dakar World Education Forum, the Education for All initiative and the many follow-up efforts launched in their wake reconfirmed the importance of education for all as an international priority. The New Partnership for Africa's Development also has health and education among its central concerns.

4. Achieving by 2015 the goals set requires adapting human resources development strategies to meet changing needs in the context of globalization. The challenge is to develop and implement human resources strategies that respond to local needs and global realities.

5. The present report responds to the request in General Assembly resolution 56/189 for a report on the implementation of the resolution.[2] It builds on the broader view of human resources development that has emerged over recent years and focuses on the issues addressed by resolution 56/189. These included, in particular, the need to adopt a comprehensive approach, increase investment in human resources development and promote strategies for information and communication technologies (ICT) and collaboration with the private sector and non-governmental organizations, and the harmonization of United Nations system efforts and partnerships. The important role of ICT in human resources development is particularly emphasized in paragraph 9 of resolution 56/189, which encouraged the adoption of policies, approaches and measures to narrow the increasing gap between developed and developing countries in ICT in particular and in technology in general. For this reason, the present report has a special focus on the role of ICT in promoting human resources development.

II. Human resources as a means of promoting economic growth and eradicating poverty

Human resources development in the context of globalization

6. Well-trained human capital and supportive institutional capacities are essential for developing countries to take advantage of opportunities presented by globalization. Many countries have made investments in education and health services that enable the poor to benefit from growth.[3] The developing countries that have gained the most from integrating into the world economy have shown impressive improvements in primary education and infant mortality. Conversely, today's highly competitive global economy could aggravate the gap between countries in terms of human resources development. It is therefore vital for every country to have a strong national policy to build human resources. A human resources development strategy in the context of globalization must aim to provide opportunities for all, especially women and the girl child. It must be adapted to changing trends in order to maximize positive effects for the poor and offer a participatory framework that enables people to effectively influence the decision-making processes.

7. Skills and knowledge are the engines of economic growth and social development. Policies and practices that assist individuals to become employable through training, skills development and education are crucial for improving and sustaining their productivity and income-earning opportunities, and for enhancing mobility in the labour market. The development of knowledge and skills through proper training, education, dissemination and experience has been shown to increase the productivity of the industrial sector.

8. One of the benefits of globalization is greater access to a global or regional knowledge base. Although decisions about curriculum, instructional methods, use of examinations and so forth are ultimately taken at the national or local level, they can usefully be informed by knowledge about what has worked in other countries, particularly those that share linguistic and cultural traditions. In this regard, institutions and actions at the regional level may play a particularly helpful role, given similarities among countries within a region in patterns of enrolment and retention.

Comprehensive approach to human resources development

9. Over the years, the concept of human resources development has evolved into a broader socio-economic and public policy concern for facilitating the development of human capacities, knowledge acquisition, empowerment and participation and ensuring the provision of basic social services, sustainable livelihoods, justice and equity. Human resources development is an important end in itself and contributes to building tolerance and peace, but it must also be recognized as an essential form of productive investment. In response to this shift, the United Nations system in recent years has been focusing increasingly on supporting countries in fully integrating human resources development into macroeconomic policies and poverty reduction initiatives through, inter alia, technical cooperation.

10. To promote economic and social sustainability, a multisectoral approach is needed in the actual design and implementation of development strategies at the national and international levels. A comprehensive approach should maximize synergy and mutually beneficial effects of health, education and other capacity-building approaches. For example, by integrating health, education and nutrition activities, many developing countries have been able to successfully influence child health and school retention rates and to improve the school participation rate among girls.

11. Addressing the underlying determinants of health and education is key to ensuring sustained improvements. The broader factors affecting the state of human resources development, such as environment, water and sanitation, agriculture, employment, urban and rural livelihoods, trade, tourism, energy and housing, also need to be addressed through local, national and global action. The integration of human resources development with other development activities, such as rural employment or rural infrastructure programmes, can augment the capacity and capabilities of poor people and thus help in poverty reduction.

12. Paragraph 7 of resolution 56/189 emphasized the need to ensure the full participation of women in the formulation and implementation of national and local policies to promote human resources development. Gender equality is at the core of the question of whether the Millennium Development Goals will be achieved, in the areas of improving health and fighting disease, reducing poverty and mitigating hunger, expanding education and lowering child mortality, increasing access to safe water and ensuring environmental sustainability.[4]

13. To effectively address gender inequalities, gender mainstreaming is required in all human resources development policies and programmes. Gender equality considerations are essential to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of human resources development policies and programmes.

14. Full and equal access to health care and education is fundamental for the achievement of gender equality. Educating girls is an extremely effective way to achieve economic growth and is a top-ranked social investment: a year of schooling for mothers reduces child mortality by about 10 per cent; an increase of 1 per cent in the number of women with secondary education is estimated to raise per capita income by 0.3 per cent. Educated women are more likely to send their children to — and keep them in — school. Yet 75 per cent of the world's illiterate adults are women, and 60 per cent of the 113 million children who do not have access to primary schooling are girls. Girls also constitute the majority of the millions of children who drop out of school to be married, to work or to care for families decimated by AIDS, or because they are pregnant or simply because their education is not valued.[5]

15. Various trends in the world pose special challenges to women and demand a response rooted in knowledge derived from education. An increasingly knowledge-intensive society and the growth of information and communication technologies require women to acquire appropriate education and training to function well in a changing economic, social and cultural environment. Improving access to education for girls and women also involves the need to improve physical facilities in the education system and address safety matters and other problems that can hinder girls' education.[6]

16. Good health is seen as fundamental to human resources development and national prosperity. The issues to be addressed include the supply and distribution of human resources in health professions; financial, physical and social barriers to health services; safe and predictable supplies of affordable drugs and vaccines; mechanisms for increasing health coverage; a policy and institutional framework that allows the State to act as an effective steward of the health system; and modalities for working across sectors and learning from other sectors.

17. The HIV/AIDS pandemic demands that we rapidly assess the impact on human resources development — and develop an appropriate response — particularly in high-prevalence countries. Human resources in various sectors — such as education, agriculture and health — are being eroded by the impact of the epidemic, and the functions of remaining human resources are changing, often in response to a broader and more urgent range of needs. This situation is also often exacerbated by internal and external migration.

18. To maximize the contribution of human resources development to national development, it is important to develop capacities and opportunities for all generations and include the perspectives of groups of special concern, such as persons with disabilities, older persons, youth and indigenous peoples. In the face of globalization, collective capacity-building and the empowerment of communities are as important as developing individual capacity.

Box 1
School feeding programmes

In-school feeding reduces short-term hunger, contributes to alleviating nutritional deficiencies, helps children concentrate and learn and provides an entry point and logistical capacity for other interventions, such as HIV/AIDS prevention, nutrition education, hygiene and sanitation. The food acts as an incentive and catalyst for other things to happen. Communities tend to manage the food, store it and prepare it. Community involvement contributes to programme management, complementary activities and sustainability.

The World Food Programme and its partners are increasingly addressing other health and nutrition issues of school-age children, using the platform of school feeding. National, regional and local governments are involved, as well as international and local organizations, to ensure a full range of complementary activities, such as the treatment of intestinal parasites in collaboration with the World Health Organization. Partnerships with the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization also provide complementary activities, and non-governmental organizations provide needed skills for activities at the community level.

Capacity-building

19. In order to reach internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, human resources development strategies need to identify specific capacity-development needs. Despite the gains made in the formulation and implementation of national development strategies, local communities in many developing countries continue to suffer from deepening poverty, widening disparities in the distribution of wealth, limited employment opportunities, a failing social security system and environmental problems, in addition to weak institutions that fail to guarantee mobilization of resources, coordination of efforts and broad-based participation.

20. To respond to these challenges, the United Nations system organizations assist developing countries to develop their capacities for human resources development, including through support for policy development and analysis, normative work and technical cooperation in areas such as health and education, employment and productive capacity, natural resource management and institution-building. The United Nations employs modalities such as advocacy and awareness-raising; policy analysis; consensus-building; provision of information on economic and social trends; capacity-building; sharing of good practices; building partnerships with civil society, the private sector and regional and subregional organizations; and focusing on implementation, monitoring and assessment. Considerable progress has also been made to increase cooperation among the various United Nations organizations. While working towards shared objectives using common modalities, the specific elements of individual work programmes give varying degrees of emphasis to different activities, based on the organizations' specific mandates and/or regional specificities.

21. Resolution 56/189 encouraged the United Nations system to focus in its cooperation activities on building human and institutional capacity, with specific attention given to women, girls and vulnerable groups. This has been reflected in many activities of the system, some of which are highlighted below.

22. To support capacity-building in countries, the World Health Organization (WHO) provides policy guidance and technical support in the area of human resources for health, through the compilation and dissemination of evidence to inform the strategic planning and policy development of human resources. WHO activities address such matters as the improvement of service delivery and of the overall performance of health systems, access to essential medicines and vaccines, better financing mechanisms and strengthening research. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supports national capacity-building for better understanding of population, development and poverty linkages through improved data and analysis; HIV/AIDS prevention; and, through greater advocacy for investments in girls' education, women's empowerment and reproductive health, which are crucial for development and poverty reduction. The health programme of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) aims to protect, preserve and promote the health status of Palestine refugees and meet their basic health needs.

23. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) is encouraging countries, particularly high-prevalence countries, to implement multisectoral assessments of human-resource needs and to develop appropriate short- and long-

term strategies to address the needs identified. UNAIDS also assists in, inter alia, building the capacities of national AIDS coordinating bodies and other country partners to undertake strategic planning processes, particularly in the areas of monitoring and evaluation and resource mobilization; and strengthening national capacities for mainstreaming the issue of HIV/AIDS into social, economic and development instruments and plans.

24. The activities of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasize capacity-building and human resources development, through, inter alia, education at all levels and throughout life; democratic governance; the incorporation of cultural factors in development strategies; environmental protection and harnessing science and technology for development; ethics of science; and the exercise of human rights as the guiding principle for development. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has also assisted in the development of regional action plans for the implementation of environmental education and training. As part of its efforts to strengthen women's role in household food security and support investments in the skills and knowledge of women and adolescents, the World Food Programme (WFP) implements food-for-training programmes, putting special emphasis on meeting the educational and skill-development needs of women. The capacity-development activities of the United Nations University upgrade the skills and knowledge of individuals, groups or institutions through specialized advanced training programmes for postgraduate scholars and young professionals, particularly from developing countries, and project-based capacity development. UNRWA education programmes have helped bring about universal literacy among the refugee population, as well as delivering technical and vocational training and education to Palestine refugee youth.

25. As for employment and productive capacity, the International Labour Organization (ILO) seeks to promote greater investment in skills development and training through advocacy, knowledge development and the improvement of training policies and programmes, particularly to support the integration of disadvantaged groups in the labour market. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) assists in strengthening the capacities of national, subregional and regional training institutions to deliver its training programmes in areas such as competition law, trade and environment, commercial diplomacy, trade financing, investment, e-commerce and port management, and promotes the extensive use of distance-learning techniques and networking. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) addresses industrial development through capacity-building by improving industrial governance and institutional infrastructure, strengthening small and medium-sized enterprises, upgrading technological capacities, enhancing skills and access to modern technology, building trade and export capabilities and adopting energy efficiency and cleaner production measures. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has assisted Member States in designing strategies for the promotion of secure and gainful employment and equitable and equal access to productive resources such as land, water and credit, and in reviewing and adopting policies that create conditions to encourage stable employment, especially in rural areas, including off-farm jobs. UNRWA contributes to human resources development through microenterprise development, job creation, poverty alleviation, women's empowerment and promoting economic growth through the provision of credit to Palestine refugees and other marginal sectors of the community.

26. To strengthen the capacity of small farmers and other disadvantaged groups of the rural population, including women, to sustainably manage agricultural and other land-based productive resources, FAO has provided assistance to develop and reform the capacities of rural public institutions and private sector and civil society organizations. UNFPA supports capacity-building and policy dialogue at the international and national levels on meeting priority needs of older persons, especially the poor and women. UNEP has assisted the development of environmental legislation and institutions, with an emphasis on direct involvement and training of nationals, strengthening internal follow-up and streamlining processes. In order to support Member States in their efforts to enable cities to become engines of development, especially for the poor, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) promotes capacity-building strategies to address the problem of slums.

27. In the area of public administration, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs has taken initiatives directed at improving the capacity of public sector human resources in a number of countries, such as advising Member States, on request, on reforming the civil service. In the field of civil aviation, the strategy of the International Civil Aviation Organization for human resources development was developed to respond to the need to ensure the same quality of training throughout the world for the safety and efficiency of international civil aviation. The Universal Postal Union carries out technical assistance for developing human resources and training, based on the objectives of the Beijing Postal Strategy of 1999. The World Intellectual Property Organization undertakes initiatives to harmonize human resources development with national policies and priorities in the area of intellectual property through cooperation agreements. In 2002 it also trained more than 8,500 personnel at the national level on various aspects of intellectual property. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime assists countries in the fight against organized crime, terrorism, corruption and illicit drugs by focusing technical cooperation on strengthening the capacity of governmental and non-governmental entities, as well as on strengthening their capacity in the area of criminal justice reform.

Harmonization of the activities of the United Nations system

28. Paragraph 10 of resolution 56/189 called upon the United Nations system to harmonize further its collective human resources development efforts, in accordance with national policies and priorities. Human resources development cuts across the activities of many United Nations system organizations. Their approach centres on building human and institutional capacity in developing countries, targeting various levels, ages and groups. A number of actions have been taken at various levels to foster collaboration and joint action among the United Nations system organizations, including the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The harmonization agenda is being pursued at the global and country levels, including through joint funding/reporting mechanisms and, more specifically, the pooling of funds and technical assistance in cooperation with local governments, multilateral and bilateral organizations and other stakeholders and the use of United Nations system coordination frameworks such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.

29. The Millennium Development Goals provide a framework for close interaction among the United Nations system organizations. For example, on reporting, WHO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) share responsibilities for maternal and child health indicators, while WHO, UNAIDS and UNFPA share responsibilities for HIV/AIDS and population. The inter-agency work on reporting, in consultation with and through the United Nations country teams, ensures technical coherence in the collection, analysis and validation of data and defines reporting responsibilities. The World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Population Division are using WHO, UNICEF and UNAIDS databases as their main sources of health information in respect of the goals.

30. Thirty United Nations system agencies are committed to the United Nations System Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS for 2001-2005, aimed at guiding the United Nations system response over that five-year period. Developed within the overall context of the Global Strategy Framework on HIV/AIDS, the Strategic Plan identifies the key functions of the United Nations system in support of national efforts and describes the approach and priorities of the participating United Nations system organizations in a coordinated response. The framework to monitor progress towards achieving the United Nations system objectives and the goals of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS was endorsed in 2002, and its mid-term review is planned for the second half of 2003.

31. Many of the United Nations capacity-development activities are designed and implemented in collaboration among the United Nations system organizations at the global, regional and country levels. In the process of joint programme or project development, concepts of capacity or human resources development are discussed and jointly developed.

32. At the regional level, the regional commissions pursue an integrated approach to implementing the Millennium Development Goals and the outcome of the global United Nations conferences, inter alia, through the collection and dissemination of best practices, exchange of experience and networking in a variety of fields. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) sponsored the African Learning Group on Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, while the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has proposed a strategy to promote poor people's productive participation in the labour market. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia mobilizes locally available resources to develop cooperation and group self-reliance in the local rural community, including local leaders, women, youth and older persons. The regional commissions' efforts in promoting effective integration of the developing countries in the global economy are channelled through their regional integration work and support for the multilateral trading arrangement under WTO. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and ECA have been especially active in supporting the least developed countries in the Doha process. The Economic Commission for Europe extends assistance to facilitate the integration of transitional countries into the global economy. For all of them, ICT has emerged as one of the priority programmes in recent years.

Box 2
United Nations Girls' Education Initiative

The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, launched by the Secretary-General at Dakar in April 2000, is an example of a global initiative that brings together 13 United Nations entities to support partnerships for girls' education at the national and regional levels. Under the Initiative, the agencies and their partners have committed themselves to a 10-year campaign for girls' education, which is aimed at improving the availability and quality of girls' education throughout the world. The overall objective of the Initiative is to eliminate gender discrimination and disparities in education systems through actions at the national, district and community levels. While the priority focus of the Initiative is basic education, in line with the global Education for All movement and the education goals of world conferences, it also supports the transition to secondary education and other aspects of education that facilitate girls' lifelong learning.

Partnerships

33. Paragraph 14 of resolution 56/189 encouraged the United Nations system to continue to engage in partnerships with the private sector so as to contribute further to the building of human resources development capacity in developing countries. The capacity-building and human resources development work conducted by the United Nations system organizations involves engagement and collaboration with non-governmental organizations and the private sector through numerous activities, including research and analysis, the dissemination of statistical and other information and technical cooperation projects. The financing for development process, leading up to the Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development, opened new avenues of cooperation with various stakeholders.

34. Voluntary, non-negotiated partnerships aimed at achieving sustainable development constitute an important outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. A significant number of these partnerships have a stated focus on capacity-building, while the remainder include capacity-building as an effective tool to achieve their goals. Capacity-building in the context of these partnerships involves developing a range of individual and institutional capacities for sustainable development at the local, national and regional levels.

35. The private sector has been recognized as a crucial stakeholder in development cooperation, notably in recent major United Nations conferences. The Global Compact, since its official launch by the Secretary-General in July 2000, has expanded into a broad-based corporate citizenship initiative encompassing over 1,000 business entities, five United Nations agencies, international labour groups and more than 20 civil society organizations at the global level. Its multi-stakeholder cooperation has brought some tangible results, including an initiative to grow sustainable business in the least developed countries; a Business Guide to Conflict Impact Assessment and Risk Management; policy recommendations on transparency; and an agreement between international employers and labour groups

to cooperate in the fight against HIV/AIDS. A comprehensive report on global partnerships will be submitted separately to the General Assembly at its fifty-eighth session, under the agenda item entitled "Towards global partnerships".

36. The need to ensure optimum use of the potential of the private sector and civil society organizations is well recognized in many other areas — for example, in strengthening health systems, supporting improved human resources management within companies and building institutions. Partners need to be more closely engaged in discussions on training policy and skills development, since a strong social dialogue process underpins the more successful training systems.

Box 3
Partnerships to fight diseases

In the light of their human, social and economic toll, infectious diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, are fundamental barriers to development, and they require special attention. UNAIDS is promoting and supporting the formation of practical and functional partnerships between Governments and civil society organizations, including those representing people living with HIV/AIDS, women, young people and the private sector, in the implementation of human resources needs assessments and action plans.

A major challenge in the fight against HIV/AIDS is that of access to anti-retroviral drugs and drugs for opportunistic infections, as well as to treatment, which includes clinical management, nursing care, counselling and social and psychological support. The International HIV Treatment Access Coalition was launched in December 2002 to improve efforts to extend access to anti-retroviral drugs to more people in developing countries. It brings together more than 50 partners, including non-governmental organizations, donors and Governments, people living with HIV and their advocates, the private sector, research institutions and international organizations.

In late 2003, the UNAIDS secretariat will also facilitate the establishment of regional technical support facilities that will strengthen the ability of country partners to scale up national responses to HIV/AIDS by responding to their requests for capacity-building support and technical assistance in priority areas. Another such initiative is the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization.

III. The role of information and communication technologies in promoting human resources development

37. It is generally recognized that information and communication technologies are powerful tools for advancing human resources development. By improving communication and access to information and knowledge, they have an immense empowering potential for enhancing effective participation in economic, social, cultural, political and other human activities. ICT can be a potent tool for the

acceleration of economic growth and productivity, promoting sustainable human well-being, enhancing good governance and alleviating poverty.

38. However, many countries, in particular developing countries and countries with economies in transition, cannot achieve the full potential benefits of the use of ICT due to lack of access, inadequate infrastructure and, even more importantly, lack of necessary human capacity. Ensuring access to new technologies and building human skills for the knowledge society are critical elements for the successful use of ICT for human development and for enhancing human and institutional capacities.

39. The organizations of the United Nations system have contributed in many ways to initiatives aimed at enabling developing countries to seize digital opportunities and thus promote and support broader and more equitable human resources development. Considerable efforts have been made to strengthen the education sector, in particular ICT literacy, and to introduce ICT applications for development, as well as to build and develop ICT infrastructure and promote appropriate policies to support countries' efforts to leverage development through ICT. The project Achieving E-Quality in the ICT Sector, supported by the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the Association of South-East Asian Nations SchoolNet project, supported by UNESCO, are but two examples of initiatives that focus on human resources development.

40. The various initiatives have adopted new approaches that recognize the importance of partnerships and collaborative interaction among Governments, the private sector, civil society and international organizations to achieve maximum impact.

41. Harnessing ICT for human resources development is a key priority of the United Nations Information and Communication Technologies Task Force. The Task Force was launched by the Secretary-General on 20 November 2001 to respond to the challenge of promoting widespread deployment and innovative use of ICT and bringing the benefits of the digital revolution to the developing countries. It serves as a catalyst with a facilitating and advisory role designed to bring all stakeholders together, coordinate actions and build partnerships to integrate ICT into development programmes.

42. The Task Force has supported training programmes and other activities aimed at developing ICT literacy and building human capacities in the use of ICT for development. Through its Working Group on Human Resources and Capacity-building, the Task Force has worked closely with relevant United Nations agencies and other partners from the private and public sectors to enhance stakeholders' capacity to apply relevant ICT in initiatives related to community and economic development, governance, health, environment, education and disaster management. The Working Group also focuses on promoting programmes at all levels in order to provide individuals with appropriate technical skills to access ICT and facilitate the development of a technologically enabled work force.

43. Another key factor in ensuring effective use of ICT is the development of ICT infrastructure. Through its Working Group on Low Cost Connectivity and Access, the Task Force seeks to promote innovative solutions for affordable connectivity, including for the poor and in rural and remote areas. The Working Group is exploring ways of making the excess cable and satellite capacity of telecommunications carriers available to developing countries on a discounted basis.

In another initiative, the Working Group, in partnership with public and private partners, is exploring the possibility of establishing national and regional Internet exchange points in developing regions, especially in Africa, to minimize the need for expensive international connectivity, allowing Internet service providers and other network managers to achieve economies of scale in their network connectivity and expand regional coordination and cooperation on telecommunications issues.

44. The Task Force is promoting policies that help enhance developing countries' institutional capacities. Through its Working Group on National and Regional e-Strategies, the Task Force is supporting developing countries' efforts to develop comprehensive national strategies to effectively integrate ICT in their development programmes and facilitate access and use of ICT to enhance development opportunities. The Working Group has developed a document entitled "National and regional e-development strategies: a blueprint for action", a road map containing elements and steps that appear to enhance success in formulating and implementing national and regional e-strategies. At the international level, the Task Force is helping ensure a meaningful involvement of developing countries in global policy-making related to ICT.

45. The Working Group is also developing an initiative to provide technical assistance to developing countries on e-commerce and ICT issues addressed in the WTO Doha Development Agenda and possibly in other bilateral or regional trade negotiations. The initiative's objective is to help developing countries identify and represent their interests on e-commerce and ICT-related issues arising in such trade negotiations.

46. Harnessing the potential of ICT for human resources development has been a priority of many organizations of the United Nations system. Their activities have focused on raising awareness of the potential offered by ICT and on promoting applications of new technologies to the various thematic areas relating to development.

47. FAO has built a substantial knowledge base of information, gathered through workshops, expert consultations and publications, relating to the application of ICT policies and strategies to further rural development and enhance food security. UN-Habitat has been working to make ICT relevant to the real needs of cities in developing contexts. A strategic partnership has been developed with the Environmental Systems Research Institute, which is a leading developer of geographic information system (GIS) software. This partnership will lead to the provision of GIS technology and training for up to 1,000 cities in least developed countries, to enable them to participate in the collection of urban-indicator information and improve city management.

48. Information and communication technologies have also been used to improve the efficiency, accessibility and quality of the learning process in developing countries. UNCTAD has promoted the extensive use of distance-learning techniques and networking to build and strengthen training capacities at the national, regional and subregional levels in its areas of competence. A tailor-made strategy for implementing a distance-learning process has been developed to respond to the specific needs of the least developed countries. In that strategy, a feasibility study is undertaken in the future beneficiary country to identify available local institutions capable of delivering distance-learning training, as well as available computers, networks, Internet facilities and local facilitators, who will be trained by UNCTAD.

The strategy also includes the evaluation of distance-learning training networks available in partner countries, as well as of distance-learning training activities developed and implemented by other agencies or institutions, with a view to increasing cooperation between operators, maximizing synergies and avoiding overlaps. It furthermore recommends the design of specific solutions that combine face-to-face training activities with distance learning, in line with the priorities of the beneficiary countries.

49. The upcoming World Summit on the Information Society provides a unique opportunity to forge a global consensus and galvanize political leadership. The Summit could achieve the level of commitment required to address the challenges of bridging the digital divide and building a truly inclusive approach to information and knowledge, and thus to advance towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

IV. Increasing investment in human resources development

50. A number of benefits of investment in education and training have been identified. Primary education is a potent means of reducing poverty and inequality, with particularly marked benefits for the poorest segments of society. In low-income settings, primary education deserves priority in the allocation of resources. Studies have found that primary education contributes to better natural-resource management and more rapid technological adaptation and innovation, and that education is linked with the greater diffusion of information, which is crucial for boosting productivity.[7]

51. Yet many countries lack adequate resources to expand coverage and improve the quality of education and are especially challenged in providing free universal primary education. Overall tax revenues are weak, ministries often have to compete for domestic budget resources, and funds are often not available at the local level, where they are most needed. Gender disparities are also an acute problem in areas related to human resources. Estimates of additional external financing needed for primary schooling alone run from just under $5 billion to over $10 billion annually, and assume that countries will direct more of their own resources to education. Providing secondary and tertiary education requires additional funding.[8]

52. Regarding health, the report of the WHO Commission on Macroeconomics and Health on investing in health for economic development highlighted the magnitude of resources needed to achieve a positive impact on the health of the poor. The Commission estimates that additional annual spending of $66 billion on health could generate benefits worth at least $360 billion per year in the period 2015-2020 — a sixfold return on investment. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is one of the principal financing vehicles for paying for AIDS prevention and treatment strategies. Although the creation of the Global Fund reflected a collective global effort on the part of many nations, the private sector and individuals, much remains to be done to close the gap between what is being spent and what needs to be spent to overcome AIDS. At the same time, to produce the desired results of increased funding, the health systems of developing countries also need to be expanded, reformed and strengthened. This will require a wide range of interconnected investments and more effective strategies for using donor funds and technical assistance to build capacity.

53. Recent international conferences and summits provided a fresh impetus for overcoming the climate of aid fatigue in regard to development assistance, although total official development assistance still falls well short of the commitments made at Monterrey and Johannesburg. According to estimates of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), fulfilling those promises would raise official development assistance in real terms by 31 per cent (about $16 billion) and the ratio of official development assistance to gross national income to 0.26 per cent by 2006 — still well below the ratio of 0.33 per cent consistently achieved until 1992. Member countries of the OECD Development Assistance Committee increased their official development assistance to developing countries by 4.9 per cent in real terms, accounting for inflation, from 2001 to 2002. The total amounted to $57 billion, equivalent to 0.23 per cent of their combined resources, measured as gross national income, marking the beginning of a recovery from the all-time low of 0.22 per cent of gross national income in each of the previous three years.

54. Concerted efforts must be made to significantly increase investments in health and education with the aim of providing access to health care and education for all persons living in poverty in developing countries, women and men alike, including groups with special needs, such as people with disabilities. Current levels of investment in health and education are inadequate. In per capita terms, public health spending is very low in most developing countries: in 2000 the median was $1,061 in high human development countries, $194 in medium human development countries and just $38 in low human development countries, in purchasing power parity terms.[9] Relative to rich countries, developing countries spend much less per student and as a proportion of gross national product at all levels of education.[10] Inequity problems also exist. For example, in most poor countries the provision of basic education is highly inequitable, with the poorest 20 per cent of people receiving much less than 20 per cent of the benefits of public spending, while the richest 20 per cent receive much more.[11] Increased resources are needed from all sources to provide adequate and sustained resources for effective programmes.

55. Trade is one of the important sources for fostering development and financing human resources development. A universal, rule-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system, as well as meaningful trade liberalization, can stimulate development and generate resources that can be used to strengthen the delivery of education and health services. External debt relief, including debt swaps for social development, can also contribute to liberating resources for activities consistent with attaining sustainable growth and development, such as in the areas of health and education.

56. Remittances are another important source of financing for many developing countries. Remittances are the second largest source of external financing, after foreign direct investment, and are considered to be more stable and longer term than official development assistance or private capital flows. The World Bank estimated remittances through official channels in 2002 at $80 billion.[12] If the estimates for remittances through unofficial channels were included, the figure would be significantly higher. Regimes to better manage and channel remittances into investments are needed, such as microinvestments in community development funds or future remittance-backed securitization.

57. Although increased spending on education and health is key to poverty reduction, simply allocating more resources to these sectors does not ensure a

decline in poverty. Greater attention needs to be given to the distribution of social spending and the way these sectors are managed. Instead of simply providing services to the poor, it is necessary to meet their needs for services. Health and education expenditures need to be better targeted, and policies must be judged by their outcomes and enhance the efficiency of these sectors. Expenditure should be directed to universal schemes, such as establishing rural and urban clinics, kindergartens and primary schools that serve the poor. Education and training investments should be closely linked to economic and employment growth strategies and programmes, and should respond to the demands of the economy.

Box 4
Promoting financing of pro-poor health policies

WHO is strengthening the evidence base for pro-poor health policy options, by systematically documenting the design and implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and relating them to more complete and comparable evidence on trends in health system inputs, coverage and outcomes. Further, as part of the country focus initiative, WHO is strengthening its ability to provide support to national health authorities in their design of pro-poor health policies. This will enable Member States to allocate funds from debt relief and other sources to strategies that are effective and meet the needs of the poor and other vulnerable groups. WHO has also devised an asset index that can be used to compare the health of poor people with that of non-poor, and to determine whether a health system is less responsive to the needs of the poor.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

58. **Strategies for human resources development should include developing capacities and opportunities for all generations and the perspectives of groups of special concern, such as persons with disabilities, older persons, youth and indigenous peoples. Gender equality considerations should be made an essential element of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of human resources development policies and programmes.**

59. **Concerted efforts must be made to significantly increase investments in health and education, with the aim of providing access to health care and education to all persons living in poverty, women and men alike, including groups with special needs, such as people with disabilities. Health and education expenditures also need to be better targeted.**

60. **The HIV/AIDS pandemic requires urgent efforts combining short-term humanitarian responses with long-term development measures to rebuild the human capacity lost to AIDS.**

61. **Training systems need to become more flexible and responsive to rapidly changing skill requirements, and should also serve learners in the informal economy. School-to-work schemes for young people should integrate education with workplace learning.**

62. **The development of core work skills (such as communication, problem-solving, etc.) should form an important part of basic education and literacy programmes to prepare individuals for the knowledge- and skills-based society.**

63. **The application of distance-learning techniques could be extended to various human resources development activities and programmes.**

64. **Policies for expanding the use of technologies should take into account the existing capacities, means and possibilities in the countries concerned and encourage the use of available local resources, including traditional information systems.**

65. **Information and communication technologies should be adapted to the needs of communities and made as user-friendly and accessible to the community as possible.**

66. **Efforts should be made to increase the flow of development financing and its greater allocation to human resources development.**

Notes

[1] See A/57/3 part I, para. 44, "Ministerial declaration of the high-level segment submitted by the President of the Council", para. 3.

[2] In the preparation of the report, contributions were received from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Labour Organization, the Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations University, the Universal Postal Union, the World Food Programme, the World Intellectual Property Organization and the World Health Organization.

[3] See *Globalization, Growth and Poverty: Building an Inclusive World Economy* (World Bank, 2002).

[4] See United Nations Development Programme *Human Development Report 2003*, p. 50.

[5] See E/CN.9/2003/3, para. 40.

[6] Ibid., para. 41.

[7] See E/CN.9/2003/2, para. 10.

[8] See Joint statement on the second anniversary of the World Education Forum by the heads of UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the World Bank, 26 April 2002.

[9] See UNDP *Human Development Report 2003*, p. 98.

[10] Ibid., p. 93.

[11] Ibid., p. 7.

[12] See *Global Development Finance 2003 — Striving for Stability in Development Finance*, p. 160 (World Bank, 2003).